

Literary Analysis: Character Traits

Name:

The following are quotes pulled directly from the text. Re-read each passage, then answer the question that follows. Be as detailed and specific as possible in your answer.

1. *“In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall”* (26-32).

What do we learn in the passage about the kind of person Mama is? Be sure to cite specific reasons for your inferences.

2. *“ ‘How do I look, Mama?’ Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she’s there, almost hidden by the door.*

‘Come out into the yard,’ I say.

‘Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? That’s the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground’ (43-51).

Which of Maggie’s character traits are revealed in this passage? Again, refer specifically to the information provided in the passage.

3. "No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we 'choose' to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends" (90-92).

What do we learn about Dee in the above passage? Be specific and detailed in explaining your inference.

4. "After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the truck at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

'Mama,' Wangero said sweet as a bird. 'Can I have these old quilts?'

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed" (208-220).

How does this passage highlight the contrasting character traits of Dee and Maggie?

5. *“She put on some sunglasses that hide everything about the tip of her nose and her chin.*

Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed” (278-293).

How do Dee’s sunglasses, Mama’s snuff, and Maggie’s smile help epitomize, or sum up, each character?